

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BOGOTA 04900 291719Z

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

PC-01 ARAE-00 /062 W

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P 291638Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8869

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 4900

E.O. 11652: GDS

SUBJECT: MILITARY CHANGES

TAGS: PINT, MORG, CO

REF: BOGOTA 4879

1. A RELIABLE SOURCE WHO IS A RETIRED ARMY OFFICER AND A CLOSE FRIEND OF VALENCIA TOVAR HAS PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING EXPLANATION OF WHAT LED UP TO VALENCIA TOVAR'S RETIREMENT BY THE PRESIDENT, REFLECTING IN PART SOURCES CONVERSATION WITH VALENCIA AFTER THE EVENT. ASPECTS OF THE ACCOUNT ARE CORROBORATED BY OTHER SOURCES, AND WE BELIEVE IT PROVIDES A ROUGHLY ACCURATE EXPLANATION OF WHAT HAPPENED:

A) THE FORCED RETIREMENT OF VALENCIA WAS THE CULMINATION OF A LONG RIVALRY AND MUTUAL DISLIKE AND THE RESULT OF A SPECIFIC SHOWDOWN PROVOKED BY BOTH.

B) THE PROXIMATE CAUSE WAS AN ACCOUNT OF THE RECENT CHANGES WHICH APPEARED IN THE CALI DAILY OCCIDENTE MAY 24. THIS ACCOUNT, WHICH WAS IMPLICITLY CRITICAL OF VALENCIA, WAS, SOURCE BELIEVES FROM INTERNAL EVIDENCE, PROVIDED BY A HIGH ARMY OFFICER KNOWLEDGEABLE OF EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES, AND PROBABLY SOMEONE CLOSE TO VARON. THE ACCOUNT WAS A BASIC SOURCE OF THE UPI DESPATCH PRINTED IN BOGOTA WHICH CAUSED A STIR (REFTEL).

C) WHEN THE OCCIDENTE ARTICLE APPEARED VALENCIA SOUGHT OUT VARON AND GENERAL HERRERA TO GET A RECTIFICATION. HE
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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 04900 291719Z

WAS UNABLE TO MEET WITH THEM UNTIL MAY 26. VALENCIA, VARON

AND HERRERA, SOURCE CLAIMS, AGREED ON A STATEMENT TO BE MADE PUBLICLY BY MINISTRY. AFTER UPI STORY APPEARED MAY 27 VALENCIA FELT HE WOULD HAVE TO ISSUE A STATEMENT SEPARATELY BUT APRALLELING MINISTRY'S STATEMENT. VALENCIA CLAIMS THAT SUBSEQUENT TO AGREEING ON THE TEXT OF A MINISTRY STATEMENT, VARON CHANGED THE TEXT AND DID NOT INFORM HIM. THAT IS WHY THERE APPEARS TO BE A CONTRADICTION IN THE TWO STATEMENTS (REFTEL).

D) VARON'S STATEMENT ACCUSES PUYANA AND COL JIMENEZ OF LACK OF DISCIPLINE AND ATTRIBUTES PUYANA'S FORCED RETIREMENT HIS PROTESTING A LEGITIMATE TRANSFER. VALENCIA'S STATEMENT DEFENDS THE LOYALTY OF THE TWO OFFICERS, AND STATED THEY WERE NOT GUILTY OF QTE DISLOYALTY UNQTE OR PLOTTING. IN ANY CASE, THE TWO STATEMENT MADE QUITE CLEAR PUBLICLY THERE WAS AND HAD BEEN A SERIOUS DIVERGENCE BETWEEN VALENCIA AND VARON.

E) AS RESULT OF THIS SEQUENCE OF EVENTS, BOTH DECIDED THEY COULD NOT CONTINUE FUNCTIONING TOGETHER AND A CHANGE HAD TO BE MADE. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, VARON WENT TO PRESIDENT FIRST AND INITIATED THE MARATHON MEETINGS CONVINCING HIM THAT VALENCIA HAD TO GO. SUBSEQUENTLY VALENCIA WAS SUMMONED BY THE PRESIDENT. THE PRESIDENT WAS IN EFFECT ASKED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN VARON AND VALENCIA, AND HE WAS CONVINCED HE COULD NOT LET THE SITUATION CONTINUE WITH BOTH ON ACTIVE DUTY. VALENCIA TOLD SOURCE THAT THE PRESIDENT SUGGESTED HE RETURE, TO WHICH VALENCIA REPLIED THAT SINCE HIS CONSCIENCE WAS CLEAR AND HE FELT HE HAD BEEN CORRECT HE WOULD NOT DO SO VOLUNTARILY ALTHOUGH THE PRESIDENT HAD THE POWER TO REMOVE HIM.

F) SOURCE BELIEVES PRESIDENT LOPEZ WAS NEVER COMFORTABLE WITH VALENCIA BECAUSE OF THE LATTER'S LOVE OF PUBLICITY AND HIS FREQUENT INTERVIEWS AND STATEMENTS STRESSING LOYALTY TO THE QTE PATRIA UNQTE, WHICH BY INFERENCE MIGHT HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AS MEANING VALENCIA FELT NO PARTICULAR RESPONSIBILITY TO THE ADMINISTRATION AS SUCH. VALENCIA TRIED TO OFFSET THIS INTERPRETATION IN RECENT STATEMENTS, BUT SOURCE BELIEVES LOPEZ NEVERTHELESS WAS NO FAN OF VALENCIA.

G) SOURCE STATES THAT SENTIMENT IN THE ARMY AGAINST VARON IS STRONG AND RISING, AND THERE IS PARTICULAR DISMAY AT WHAT MANY BELIEVE TO BE DOCUMENTABLE PROOF THAT VARON CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BOGOTA 04900 291719Z

HAS BEEN CORRUPT, ENGAGING IN CONTRABAND AND KICKBACKS ON ARMS PURCHASES. IN ANY CASE, HE THINKS SENTIMENT IN THE ARMY WILL FORCE PRESIDENT LOPEZ TO MAKE ADDITIONAL CHANGES, INCLUDING VARON, IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS AND MONTHS.

H) SOURCE STATED THAT NO SERIOUS THREAT OF A GOLPE OR COUP PLOTTING EXISTED, AND NO ALLEGATION OR BELIEF TO THAT EFFECT REALLY PLAYED ANY CENTRAL ROLE IN VALENCIA'S REMOVAL.

2. IT APPEARS FROM FOREGOING THAT THE RECENT EVENTS REFLECT ESSENTIALLY AN INTERNAL POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT AND A CLASH BETWEEN TWO STRONG PERSONALITIES. THE REMOVAL OF THE POPULAR VALENCIA HAS CREATED CONSTERNATION AND SOME TENSION IN THE OFFICER CORPS, BUT NO ONE BELIEVES AT THIS POINT THAT THERE IS ANY DANGER OF A REBELLION OR COUP ATTEMPT. AND CERTAINLY VALENCIA IS TAKING IT LIKE A GOOD SOLDIER. OF MORE CONCERN ARE THE POSSIBLE LONGER RANGE EFFECTS--THE NURSING OF GRUDGES, WHAT SOME BELIEVE WILL BE THE DETERIORATING EFFECT ON THE MORALE, DISCIPLINE, AND PROFESSIONALISM OF THE ARMY OF THESE EVENTS, AND CONCERN AS TO WHAT PRESIDENT LOPEZ REALLY THINKS OF (OR HOW SYMPATHETIC HE IS TO) THE MILITARY AS AN IMPORTANT INSTITUTION OF SOCIETY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY PERSONNEL, PRESS COMMENTS, REMOVAL FROM OFFICE, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 MAY 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BOGOTA04900
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750188-0338
From: BOGOTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975057/aaaaafov.tel
Line Count: 129
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 BOGOTA 4879
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 SEP 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <17 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MILITARY CHANGES TAGS: PINT, MORG, CO
TAGS: PINT, MORG, CO, (LOPEZ MICHELSEN, ALFONSO), (VALENCIA TOVAR), (VARON)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006